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ABSTRACT

To examine some of the linguistic aspects of Chicano English (a variety of English commonly spoken by Mexican American bilinguals in the Southwest) which present problems in the acquisition of written Standard English, sample writings were collected from 15 University of Texas-El Paso students enrolled in an English as a Second Language course. To obtain an adequate sample of natural and reading pronunciation in English, ethnographic interviews with students who reflected monolingual English speaking residential patterns during their first six years were recorded along with the reading aloud of compositions previously written by the students. The phonological aspects of Chicano English in the El Paso, Texas, community were also observed and documented for three years. The writing samples demonstrated problems in literacy development in the following areas: orthography; phonological confusion (devoicing, defricativization, consonant cluster deletion, lexing of vowels, loss of "wh" versus "w" distinction, and other pronunciations; and non-standard varieties, embedded question inversion, and consonant deletion of indefinite article). Results indicated that the difficulty in the writing system of English was due to dialect background among bilinguals, to lack of familiarity with the English writing system, and to contact with Spanish (manifested in interference). (CM)

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Abstract

LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN BILINGUAL CONTEXTS: MEXICAN-AMERICANS

Mexican-American speech repertoires reflect an unusually complex sociolinguistic situation in the United States, esepcially in the Southwest where bilingualism takes on so many different dimensions ranging from Spanish dominant speakers to Spanish/English code-switchers to English dominant speakers. In addition to two languages being in contact, there are often different varieties of each of these two languages (or more) also in contact, including Southwestern Spanish and Mexican-American (Chicano) English. As a result, Mexican-Americans form many different populations for literacy development. At least two populations of learners have been dealt with in the literature: (1) those who are Spanish dominant and consequently encounter a great deal of interference from Spanish in becoming literate in English and (2) those who may or may not be code-switchers but are bilingual with access not only to some Spanish and some English but also to a special variety of English -Chicano English. The latter group has often learned to communicate verbally in a variety of codes but encounter difficulties learning to write Standard English. The purpose of this paper is to examine some of the linguistic aspects of Chicano English which present problems in the acquisition of written Standard English for Mexican-American bilinguals at the college/university level. It is believed that a clearer understanding of the verbal repertoires used by these bilinguals can aid in the development of more helpful pedagogical strategies in teaching writing.

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Literacy Development in Bilingual Contexts: Mexican-Americans

Introduction[1]

The sociolinguistic situation in which Mexican-Americans (Chicanos) find themselves in the Southwest is a dynamic and multilinguistically complex one. Although there is some degree of regional variation, bilingualism is the norm. For the most part, Standard English is the dominant language for formal uses, especially written modes of communication, and Spanish occupies the position of a vernacular for informal interaction. This is an oversimplification, however. A Southwest bilingual may display several registers of Spanish and English in his repertoire. The term which best illustrates the sociolinguistic situation is "bilingual dialects"- -derived from Haugen (1969). Bilingual dialects refer to a linguistic two-dimensionality of function for a dual language community.

The taxonomy given in Figure 1 is a somewhat idealized classification of the linguistic situation. Forming the end points of this continuum are Standard American English and Standard Mexican Spanish, corresponding to the northern dialect. Like other New World varieties, Standard Mexican Spanish developed basically from rustic Spanish speech of the 16th century but has also been influenced considerably through lexical borrowing from Nahuatl and other Indian languages (Ornstein,1971).A minority of Southwesterners control this variety effectively. Two other dialects of Spanish which can be distinguished are the Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado variety which descended directly from the speech of the sixteenth and seventeenth century Spanish conquistadores as well as a general Southwest Spanish. The latter, based on rural Mexican Spanish, is fully a bilingual dialect, whose norms reflect English contact either in the form of items in various stages of rephonemicization and semantic shift or through code-switching.

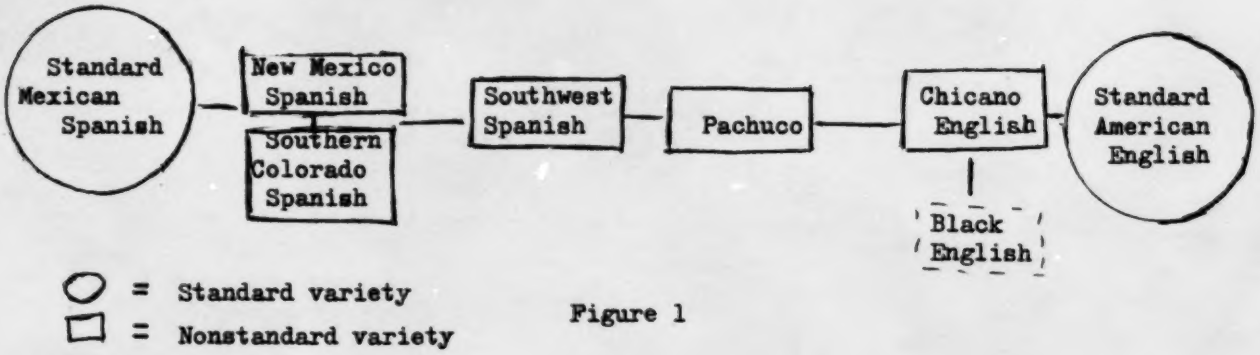

Figure 1

Pachuco is a specialized jargon or code which essentially utilizes the syntactic and phonological system of Spanish but creates its own lexical innovations- -borrowing from Mexican Spanish, Standard English, Chicano English, underworld jargon, and the Romany language (Ornstein, 1972). Pachuco enjoys rather wide usage among younger males throughout the Southwest as a street discourse and for slang effect. Often lexical terms beginning here, creep into the Southwest Spanish of other speakers, so that this street koiné becomes no longer exclusively bound to the lower socio-economic classes nor to the delinquents or adolescents. Erroneously, many linguistically naive observers have confused Pachuco with Southwest Spanish.

Next along the continuum is the contact vernacular, Chicano English. Chicano English may be defined as a variety of English which has originated from contact with Spanish along with other social and regional dialects of English, including southern English and Black English. As more research is carried out on Chicano English in different parts of the Southwest, it becomes clearer that it is a nonstandard variety of English which displays norms of its own linguistically, most of which have developed through contact with other varieties of English. Quite naturally some of these norms reflect predictable interference between Spanish and English which has developed diachronically into a community norm. However, other norms reflect just the opposite, perhaps an attempt to hypercorrect or display non-interference.

These will be discussed in this paper.

It is important to note the relatively stable nature of bilingualism in the Southwest, reinforced by centuries of co-existence of anglo and hispano speech communities and cultures. Such stability is in direct contrast to the dynamic or transitory bilingualism of immigrant groups from Europe who settled in the New World and whose offspring became monolingual in little more than one generation. Such does not appear to happen in the majority of the Chicano communities in the Southwest. Perhaps this linguistic stability has been aided by the proximity to Mexico and the heavy immigration from Mexico to the U.S. of persons seeking and finding employment both on a short term basis and as settlers. We must also not forget the ancestral tie between Hispanic families residing in the Southwest and Mexican families reflected in visits to relatives in Mexico or residential movement from one side of the border to the other and sometimes back again. This fluid interchange between Chicanos and Mexicans on both sides of the border acts to counterbalance the heavy English linguistic interference, serving at the same time to prevent the creolization of Spanish and to maintain it essentially as a variety of American Spanish.

Although the situation described above varies more in degree than in substance, El Paso, Texas which shares the border with its neighboring Mexican city, Juárez, represents the epitomy of the blend between dynamic and stable language contact.[2] Those who have just entered El Paso from different parts of Mexico exert a dynamic influence bringing with them Mexican culture and usually monolingualism in different varieties of Mexican Spanish while those who have lived in El Paso for several generations or more exert a stable influence with their Mexican-American cultural values and both Southwest Spanish and Chicano English or in some cases Standard "Anglo" English. This stable and dynamic language situation presents problems in literacy development in English which this paper will touch on, since all of the students in this study represent a blend of the

stable and dynamic language situation.

Literacy Development: Linguistic Considerations

The students who take ESL courses in our university (UT-El Paso) along the U.S.-Mexican border form two major groups in terms of language background. The majority of them have resided in Mexico (the country) and received their schooling in Spanish with minimal instruction in English, except for a few who have attended binational centers where bilingual education is practiced at the high school level. For the most part, this group of students is fairly literate in Spanish and their written English quite naturally reflects predictable interference at the syntactic level while their spoken English reflects a great deal of phonological interference typical of Spanish speakers learning English. Mingled in these same classes are other students who reflect the dynamics of the residential patterns I described earlier. These students were born in the United States and acquired English through contact with Black English and Standard English-speaking monolingual children while usually maintaining some degree of Spanish in the home. They resided in English speaking communities in the states for at least the first six or seven years and then were returned to monolingual Spanish speaking communities in various parts of Mexico to finish their primary and secondary education. These students do not reflect phonological interference in their spoken English, rather they reflect other nonstandard speech repertoires, but especially Chicano English. Their verbal development in English in native-like spoken repertoires is obviously apparent. For many of them, their lack of written development in English is also apparent; however, their written English at points deceptively suggests language interference and other times suggests the development of literacy in mapping

their spoken repertoire, often Chicano English, to the orthographic system of Standard English. I will argue in this paper that many of the "errors"[3] made by this group of bilinguals when writing English may seemingly reflect Spanish language interference, but are in fact the result of the lack of phonological distinctions in Chicano English as well as unfamiliarity with the writing conventions of English.

Method

A dozen or so samples of writing were collected from about 15 students. Ethnographic interviews were conducted with students reflecting monolingual English speaking residential patterns during the first six years of their life. These interviews were recorded along with the reading aloud of compositions which these students had written previously, in order to obtain an adequate sample of natural and reading pronunciation in English. A final source of data included three years of observation and documentation by the writer of phonological aspects of Chicano English in the El Paso community (see Ornstein-Galicia and Penfield (forthcoming) Chicano English: An Ethnic Border Dialect for more details). It must be noted that the examples I have selected do not come from code-switching bilinguals but rather from bilinguals whose language acquisition patterns were sequential and in most cases whose contact with monolingual speaking environments were also sequential but interrupted at various stages in language development.

Problems in Literacy Development

1. Orthography - - As Herrick (1977,1981) has mentioned, many "errors" in writing made by bilinguals are the result of inadequate familiarity with the orthographic conventions of English. An excerpt from one student illustrates this problem in Figure 2. I have circled those clearly related to spelling and underlined those which involve the spoken language system (these will be discussed later).

1. YOURE LIFE.
2. LIVING TOGETHER WITH A PERSON WITHOUT
3. BEEN MRRIADE IS SOMETHING THAT OURE PARENTS DON'T
4. ACCEPT VERY WELL, BECAUSE THEY WERE RAISE IN
5. ANOTHER WAY. I THINK IF I HADE A GIRL FRIEND AND
6. SHE WOULD LIKE TO LIVE TOGETHER WITHOUT GETIN
7. MARRIADE I WOULD ACCEPT AND MOVE WITH HER.
8. I WOULD DO THESE ONLY IF I LIVE HER IN THE US.
9. BECAUSE LIKE I SAID BEFORE IN MEXICO MY PARENTS
10. WOULD NOT APROVE THIS, AND THE SOCIETY WOULD
11. SEE US LIKE IF WE WERE BREAKING THE ROOLS BY
12. WICH WE HAVE TO LIVE.

Figure 2.

Line 10 raises an interesting question as to whether the student is really aware that the expression is "approve of" SOMETHING or whether his writing reflects interference. This example reflects the deceptiveness of the speech repertoire, since it is possible to pronounce this expression in rapid, informal speech by simply lengthening the labio-dental voiced fricative /v/ so that the vowel in "of" would get reduced and in Chicano English simply deleted. Since prepositions tend to be unstressed and consequently have reduced or even deleted vowels, Chicano English speakers can simply slide or lengthen consonants to sound very informal and cause minimal communication problems with Standard speakers; however, the writing system demands the full form and this results in examples that appear to result from interference, as those listed below. I would suggest that the interference lies between the spoken and written systems of English, not in the interference between Spanish and English.

#1 "It deals with the problems of a country boy going to work and live in a very large and modern city." (living)

#2 "My english was not as good as it supposed to be." (it's)

#3 "Now imaging that the same thing happens to a guy." (imagine)

#4 " The wolf was at bed and he said coming." (come in)

#5 "The in the night we went to the discotecs and meet a lot of girls every day." (then)

#6 "Then we lef to mexico city." (left)

#7 "Ih living in Ciudad Juárez right now and you are welcome to bisited any time you want I will be your host." (visit it)

#8 "I will trai to maked better." (make it)

#9 "The best vacation I ever had on my life is when I graduated from high school." (in) (was)

#10 "...because I fall and the water." (fell in)

#11 "With my parents I private myself of doing something because sometimes they get angry for just a little." (prevent)

#12 "I was happy there too because my friend had I lot of friend's and for a homecoming they made I lot of party's." (a) (a)

Figure 3.

Discussion[4]

In Figure 3, examples #1 and #2, I would suggest, are attempts to depict spoken Chicano English. If #1 is pronounced rapidly ("livin in") and the nasal is simply lengthened, as I suggest happens in this speaker's speech, the production would be quite natural. As for #2, even Standard speech spoken rapidly would not put a juncture between the word boundaries. If #2 were the result of interference between Spanish and English, one would expect the deletion of the subject pronoun "it" instead of the verb "is". #5 and #9, I would suggest, also reflect the same phenomenon involving the lengthening of another nasal where reduced vowels are involved

Examples #4, 7, and 8 reflect a confusion with the word boundaries in English writing but no doubt do accurately reflect the speaker's

pronunciation in terms of rhythm and junctures of these combined units. All three examples, by the way, come from students who are quite proficient in verbal communication but quite insecure about the use of the writing system in either Spanish or English.

Examples #10 and 12 illustrate an attempt to represent very similar sounds in the orthographic conventions of English. There is often confusion over the use of "and", "in", and "on" by students for several possible reasons. I would argue that for the fluent speakers of English the confusion stems from all three occurring in unstressed positions with reduced or usually deleted vowels in Chicano English ("n") so that in fact these three are homophonous. Thus when the student has to characterize these units in writing, the problem becomes more obvious. In example #12 it is interesting to note that in one instance the writer chooses the correct orthographic form "I", but then applies this equally to indefinite articles which have reduced vowels. Does this mean that in his pronunciation "I" always receives the same pronunciation as "a"- -reduced? There is evidence in other compositions to suggest that "I" and "a" are homophonous forms as in one student's composition which had one slip:

> " My parents gave me a moral and an education, and I know that doing this a would hurt my parents." (I)

Some cases of orthographic deletion seem less related to reduced vowels within phrasal units, yet they occur in word final position and could possibly stem from phonological interference with Spanish. For example:[5]

#13 "I _ really glad I decided to take this course." ('m)
#14 "But I think I __ getting it again." ('m)
#15 "We__ having so much fun." ('re)
#16 "and I__ still taking English classes." ('m)
#17 "I__been living in Mexico." ('ve)

Examples 13-16 seem to simply be cases of interference. However, it must be noted that the preferred pattern used by new learners of English

who are native speakers of Spanish is a different pattern:

"I'm still take English classes."

They tend to delete the progressive ending rather than the auxiliary according to my observations. It is, therefore, difficult at this point to know if the interference is a dialect contact one or bilingual one. As for example #17, another complication is introduced. Nonstandard English commonly uses this form in southern speech. Even Standard English in rapid speech would find it hard to pronounce the auxiliary "'ve" /v/ since it precedes a bilabial voiced stop. Since I have no examples of the negative counterpart of #17, it is difficult to pinpoint the basis of the written example.

2. Phonological confusion -- The phonological system of Chicano English reflects contact with Spanish in ways that produce confusion for bilinguals becoming literate in English. However, Chicano English also represents community speaking norms which can not be explained by interference with Spanish. A great deal of literature on Chicano English in the past decade has meticulously pointed this out through detailed field work in Chicano communities. The confusion in the writing system which I will illustrate below is the result of homophonous forms in Chicano English which are not homophonous in Standard English nor are they represented by the same orthographic unit. It is important to understand that the source of these confusions are phonological and partially semantic since often the forms are related semantically. Although many teachers would attribute the source of the error to grammatical causes or inappropriate derivations, in fact the source is clearly based on the phonological system of Chicano English. I will discuss the phonological distinctions of Chicano English in the El Paso area below.

/č/ vs. /š/: The "ch" vs. "sh" distinction is rarely phonemic in Chicano English. These two units are apparently in alternation or as Wald (1976) has suggested in the process of unmerging, at least in East Los Angeles. The result of these two sounds in free variation are forms like example # 18:

#18 "sheat" (cheat)

Devoicing: Devoicing occurs in Chicano English both for sibilants and labiodental fricatives. This could possibly be the source of the orthographic confusion in examples #19-24:

#19 "When a person on a diet is loosing..." (losing) /z/

#20 "They are so sweet and careful with you when he's your sweet-heart, but ones you get married with him he turns in a sort of mounster." (once) /s/

#21 "I'll pray for all the people I love and all the people I ones hate." (once) /s/

#22 "Today American doctors are trying to proof this theory." (prove) /v/

#23 "In Mexico we still belief that we have to get married." (believe) /v/

#24 "Once a month he adviced them." (advised) /z/

It must be noted that devoicing of sibilants has been noted in El Paso; however, in other regions of the Southwest we find remarks about the opposite trend. Register (1977) notes that in Tucson voiceless sibilants are voiced when they precede voiced consonants:

"this big" /z/

Metcalf (1972) also noted the voicing of vciceless counterparts in Mexican-American English in Riverside, California. For example: "race" /reiz/ or "house" /hauz/.

Defricativization: Some Chicano English speakers follow a pattern akin to Black English in utilizing /d/ and /t/ for the fricative counterparts found in Chicano English, resulting in at least two different orthographic mistakes given in examples #25 & 26:

#25 "tanks" (thanks)

#26 "even do to many people say that if you have your parents and family love you, you don't need friends..." (though)

Consonant cluster deletion: Consonant cluster reduction, as studies on Black English have shown, affects the grammatical system a great deal- - regular verb endings or past participles. There is much debate in Chicano English studies over this aspect. From my observations, past tense verb forms are rarely affected by this aspect and I suggest this is true because in Chicano English the past tense regular forms are marked consistently with the exception of verbs ending in /t/ or /d/. In writing, students tend to remember to mark these forms least but when speaking do pronounce the ending. This is difficult to explain since /t/ and /d/ are not in fact affected by consonant cluster endings because of the vowel inserted: /-id/. I have no explanation as yet as to what is going on in this domain.

Laxing of vowels: Contrary to what new learners of English do, Chicano English speakers tend to lax vowels rather than tense them. That is, tense vowels become lax and lax vowels remain lax, creating homophonous forms. This is definitely not the result of language interference between Spanish and English and is in fact one way to distinguish learners undergoing linguistic interference from those undergoing second dialect interference or contact. Although Gonzalez (1977) has noted this laxing in environments preceding stops, my observations suggest it is most prominent preceding "l" as in :

/sɛl/ "sale"
/fIl/ "feel"
/pUl/ "pool"

Orthographic errors in compositions reflect this dialect pattern as illustrated in examples #27- 34:

#27 "By instinct man stops eating food when filling ill." (feeling)

#28 "This are my reasons why abortion should be legal." (these)

#29 "This is why governments are permitting the sell of pornographic magazines." (sale)

#30 "Living together without been married." (being)

#31 "The role of the women in our country has being very different from the U.S.A." (been)

#32 "But know hes being changing in some ways." (But now it's been changing in some ways.)

#33 "The women had always being in the house to take care of the children." (been)

#34 "We are all human beens." (beings)

The tape recordings of natural speech reflected a definite laxing of what are normally tense vowels in Standard English: /iy/ and /ey/. The written examples above reflect the confusion in dealing with the writing system for homophonous forms. It is necessary to mention that this aspect of Chicano English is perhaps one of the most stable and one which gives eternal problems in learning to write which sometimes can only be improved by making grammatical or lexical references to the student.

Loss of /wh/ vs. /w/ distinction: Many dialects of American English do not make a phonemic distinction between /w/ and /wh/ and Chicano English is one of them, producing confusion in some less common lexical items, e.g. "which" - - spelled wich and wish . However, this affects frequent items. More productive forms involve additional vowel neutralization as in:

"where" /wɚr/ and often written were

"were" /wɚr / also written were

Thus examples like#35 & #36:

#35 "In Mexico women seem to men to incapable to accomplish a job were strenght and intelligents are combine." (where)

#36 "In a recent divorce case wich involved a young couple.." (which)

Other pronunciations:

Other problems are presented for specific lexical items such as example #37 and #38:

#37 "I thing I would be one of the more unhappy persons..." (think)

#38 "Most of the youth is learning thinks to early..." (things)

Both "think" and "thing" are pronounced homophonously so it becomes a problem as reflected in the orthography.

One lexical pair which is extremely important grammatically seems also to be suffering from the homophonous problem: "will" and "would". Although more observation needs to be done, it seems to me that these are pronounced identially as /wʊl/ so that forms like #39 appear in the writing system:

#39 "What will you like?" (would)

In #40 there is a suggestion that perhaps "won't" and "want" may also be homophonous:

#40 "When all the other young man were trying to take her out to dance she didn't won't to because she thought that he just might take her out to dance." (want)

One final set of verbs which are crucial to meaning but are commonly confused in the writing system are "had" and "have" producing #41:

" The role of women in our country has being very different. had always being in the house to take care of the children." (have)

It is possible that Chicano English like interference English uses /d/ in final position in place of /d/. The presence of two very similar

grammatical forms represented both by fricatives "have" /haв/ and "had" /haд/ both which are allophonic in the mother tongue, Spanish, may be the source of the confusion in spelling these two items. It also possible that they are homophonous. This needs to be investigated.

3. Non-standard syntactic forms:

Many non-standard syntactic forms which are shared by non-Chicano English dialects can also be found in the writing of bilinguals, including the following:

a. Topicalization:

#42 "To write about myself, it's a little difficult for me."

#43 "I think they taught us pretty good since what I know it was from them."

b. double negation:

#44 "My four years I spend there I did not learn nothing."

#45 "Now that she ain't no more by my side, I still remember her with the love she showed me."

c. verb forms typical of non-standard varieties:

#46 "I seen almost all his movies."

d. embedded question inversion:

#47 "I ask myself what would I do without a friend."

e. consonant deletion of indefinite article

#48 "I live in a apartment with two other roomates."

#49 "...to have a active sex life."

Conclusion: We have argued in this paper that the source of difficulty in the writing system of English is at least partially due to dialect background among bilinguals, part due to lack of familiarity with the English writing system, and part due to contact with Spanish which is manifested in interference.

NOTES

1. This paper is the written version of an invited presentation at the American Association for Applied Linguistics in New York City, December 27-30, 1981.

2. El Paso, located at the extreme western edge of Texas, shares a great deal of economic trade with its sister city, Juárez, Mexico. From downtown El Paso, Juárez is literally a few blocks away. In addition, because of historical and geographical ties between the two cities, many Mexican-Americans in El Paso have relatives who permanently live in Juárez. Therefore, it is not uncommon to find college students who were born in El Paso and raised in Juárez or who were born in Juárez and raised there but who crossed the border each day to attend school in El Paso.

3. "Errors" in this paper refer to failure to correctly depict the conventions of Standard American English in writing.

4. Underlined portions in the examples refer to problems that will be discussed in the body of the paper. Other portions which are easily recognizable as errors, but not underlined, will not be dealt with. Parenthesized words to the right indicate the correct written form deduced from the total context of the writing sample.

5. Blanks refer to deleted forms in the data.

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